THE CRITICS

THE CHICHESTER FESTIVAL AND THEATRE SPACE

Shaw-sighted . . .

by CHARLES SPENCER

THE Chichester Festival has chosen to launch its 21st birthday celebrations with a portrait of England in crisis.

In On The Rocks, the unemployed are marching in the streets, the Prime Minister, beset by economic difficulties, is harassed beyond endurance and the drama ends with violent clashes between the police and protesters outside No 10 itself.

But this is no angry agit-prop depiction of England in the Eighties. Bernard Shaw wrote On The Rocks in 1933, and at times it seems almost uncannily prophetic.

Again and again, lines written 50 years ago carry a chilling relevance to today's beleaguered Britain. At one point the Prime Minister inquires whether the country's warships are of any use now. Later, a Right-wing Tory conjures up visions of angry youths patrolling the streets wearing Union Jacks, an acutely-precise description of the National Front.

But for all its resonant echoes, On The Rocks disappoints.

The wide-open Chichester stage is notoriously difficult to fill, but surely is no excuse for such long stretches of plodding playing. Worse still, the directors, Jack Emery and Patrick Garland, have chosen to stage the work in the present.

Far from underlining the play's foresight, however, this tactic virtually destroys the many ironies which enliven the evening, the feeling that nothing had really changed.

The main problem, however, is the play itself. Although the writing is rich in Shavian paradox and the dialogue crackles with epigrams and elegant insults, the drama frequently threatens to disappear up its own clever-cleverness.

And for all the display of wit, the conclusion is profoundly depressing. Democracy, Shaw seems to argue, was dead on arrival. The only way to get the country off the rocks is through dictatorship.

Keith Michell's performance as the Prime Minister is impressive when he is rehearsing the published platitudes of a professional politician, "but he fails to capture the turmoil and exultation of a man whose views are dramatically turned upside-down.

Much of the support is lacklustre, but Paul Hardwick makes a memorably-aggressive Right-wing Blimp, and Nigel Stock is in strong comic form as an aristocratic landlord who finds himself strangely drawn to Cheryl Kennedy's sparky Left-winger.

JEAN MARSH and KEITH MICHELL

RAY CONNOLLY
Last night's view

I HAVE always been much annoyed by those people who become vegetarians and forsake all kinds of leather because they are opposed to the killing of animals for human consumption. So last night's World About Us (BBC-2), which was written and produced by Robin Hellier, of the BBC's natural history unit in Bristol, came as something of a supportive arm for my nagging sense of derision towards such obsessives.

Although titled Trading to Extinction, Mr Hellier's programme was also a level-headed assessment of the ways in which wildlife could be used as a valuable and renewable resource particularly for the third world.

Man is, by his own nature, a predator and a carnivore, and until relatively recently he fought a running battle with the beasts of the wild, a battle which was fairly evenly matched.

But with the increasing sophistication of weapons for hunting and the growing, selfish demand for rarer types of skin and hides in prosperous Western fashion centres, the abundance of wildlife is rapidly diminishing.

Of the one and half million living species on earth now, one becomes extinct every day, claims Mr Hellier. By the end of this decade that figure could have risen to one an hour.

Nor is extinction the result only of hunters with their clubs, guns and knives. The pet market is a massive business. Twenty seven million wildlife items passed through Miami Airport alone last year, while officials at London's Heathrow Airport estimate that only 50 per cent of birds imported into Britain by air survived the journey.

In an interesting programme Mr Hellier made a strong case for the ranching and farming of endangered species, a system which would provide income for the third world countries where such animals are indigenous while securing the survival of such species.

Market forces have a habit of increasing the value that which is rare, so it is no use hiding our heads in the sand and hoping that poachers will not be tempted.

If we want to save endangered species we must do much more than ban their slaughter. We must make it illegal to import and sell their skins and carcases while working positively to ensure their survival.

Those people who disown the predatory nature of the human condition are, no matter how well intentioned, only likely to confuse the issue. Man shares this planet with the animals and birds. They kill each other for food, as it is not unreasonable to expect the most mentally advanced animal, man, to do exactly the same.

Later on ITV came a programme which I am almost on the point of reporting under the Trades Description Act. According to my TV Times it was a Superstar Profile, but in reality it was a machine more than a few odd shots gleaned from Cecil B. DeMille of a not so recent film by Paul Newman, together with about four or eight minutes of conversation with Mr Newman himself.

Letting Mother take the load

THREE hours of Brecht in a basement of the old Charing Cross hospital might sound like noble endurance indeed. But the Internationalist Theatre's production of Mother Courage at the Theatre Space is not to be so lightly dismissed.

Like all great plays, Mother Courage readily responds to serious, straightforward, workmanlike performance by actors who are prepared to let it speak for itself.

In this production the humour and fatalism of the play come through strongly and the tight circle in which Mother Courage has to drag her wagon of provisions somehow strengthens the sense of futility her wandering conveys.

Inevitably, the strengths and weaknesses of this play are the strengths and weaknesses of its central performance in Margaret Robertson, the company is fortunate to have a Mother Courage who carries the production as stoutly as she carries her wagonload of supplies.

Grinning defiantly and making her sales pitch as though her life depended on it, she queens it over the soldiers and peasants as if to the manner born. Her great achievement is to keep our sympathy as well as our attention.

She may be the mercenary profiteer, who haggles over her son's life: she is also the kind-hearted mother who softens her rasping tones when giving advice to Kaitlin her dumb daughter, and the susceptible woman whose eyes light up when the Commander's cook makes a pass.

Margaret Robertson is well supported by Milos Kirek's lowering, imperturbable cook, and by the chaplain, played by Renu Setna with an entertaining self-importance.

The music is unpleasantly harsh and discordant. But Peter Stevenson directs very capably with a good eye for the telling detail—Mother Courage giving money for Kattrin's burial and instinctively taking the coin back

Christopher Hudson

RING 622 1202 622 1271 OR 622 1110 NOW

THE TV & VIDEO ACTION LINES

Bargain Offer
Grundig 2x4 Super Video Recorder
£639.95
Reduced to £499.95

Till 8pm weekdays 5.30pm Saturday

Call the Telefusion Action Line for the easiest, quickest and possibly the least expensive way to equip yourself with the latest and best in Video, Television and Teletext.

RENT or BUY. This unique service is brought right into your home by our courteous and experienced representatives. Demonstrated for you and your family and installed without fuss or delay.

You have a free choice of the latest models from most of the world's top manufacturers - Sony, Toshiba, Hitachi, Ferguson, Sanyo, JVC and Grundig. A really wide selection of the most technically advanced ranges of video recorders, Teletext, colour TV and portable video systems and their accessories.

You can rent them or buy them, our sales personnel will guide you to the right choice for your particular needs.

AND REMEMBER, you don't come to us, we come to you. Just pick up the phone and ring 622 1202/622 1271 or 622 1110 now.

Check out these rental examples. You'll be convinced.

VIDEO RECORDERS
choice of VHS ONLY FROM £14.62 MONTHLY EQUIV.
Sony Betamax ONLY FROM £14.16 MONTHLY EQUIV.

TELETEXT
A full range of sizes and models - 20" ONLY FROM £10.95 MONTHLY EQUIV.

COLOUR TVs
Wide choice, all sizes, example - 22" Ferguson TX ONLY £9.57 MONTHLY EQUIV.

NOTE – RATES SHOWN ARE FOR OUR ANNUAL ADVANCE PAYMENT PLAN WHICH WITH SPECIAL OFFER GIVES YOU NOT 12 BUT A FULL 13 MONTHS VIEWING AT THESE REDUCED RATES.

If you are interested, but don't want us to call just yet, phone in for our informative colour brochure about this new service.

× 2 months rent free if you pay annually in advance or one month rent free on 6 months in advance terms.

New TV and Video Recorders are subject to the usual 6 months advance rental, Teletext 3 months in advance. *Minimum rental contract 12 months. All offers subject to availability.

Put your trust in us-today Telefusion

Ask for details of our credit facilities or use

Barclaycard, Access, Trustcard, American Express or Diners Card.

YOU'LL BE AMAZED HOW MUCH TIME AND TROUBLE THIS NEW DIRECT TO YOUR HOME SERVICE WILL SAVE YOU.

And remember most of our Buy Telefusion give you a unique level of protection:

• All our TV & Teletext rentals are guaranteed not to increase for at least 6 years from date of contract.

• Only 3 months rental in advance is required on Teletext.

• Our special rental payments protection scheme covers you in the event of sickness, redundancy & accidental death for a very small monthly payment. (Only 35 pence on TV & Teletext.)

• When you buy from us you can extend the normal guarantee period up to 5 years on some purchases for a single payment at the time of purchase. (Only £95 on TV & Teletext.)

All repairs undertaken by us will be promptly carried out by our own experienced service engineers.

We'll give you all you want, you do no more than pick up the phone and call us.